

laid down during the present financial year they cannot possibly be available for the service of the Fleet in the early part of 1916, which is the time at which he said they would be absolutely necessary. I quite agree that we cannot say, or that we do not know, what Canada may do in this matter, but the right hon. gentleman has told us what is necessary for the safety of the Empire. He has told us that the Mother Country will discharge its full duties. I say that we have no right—it would be both unsafe and almost an affront to political opinion in Canada—to go on the assumption that the programme will probably be approved. At all events, it is not approved at present, and the matter being rejected, the responsibility does lie upon us to provide those ships and provide them without delay. If the Canadian Government later on offers to take them over, I am sure we shall be very much gratified, but in the meantime the right hon. gentleman must discharge the obligations for which he is responsible. It is clear that in the existing situation he is, first of all, three ships short in 1916, on his own programme.”

Six Ships Short of What is Absolutely Necessary.

“There are,” continued Mr. Lee, “the three Canadian ships which he said must be ready by that date, and, therefore, on our existing shipbuilding programme we are six ships short of the strength which he has stated is absolutely necessary for the world-wide protection of the British Empire in 1916. The advancing of the three contract ships in his own programme this year really makes no difference at all to the position in 1916. All it does is that we shall have thirty-nine ships in 1916 in the British programme against the next strongest Power with twenty-six. We may get the thirty-nine ships before the next strongest Power has got its twenty-six, but